ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN 2014 GENERAL ELECTIONS

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ABSTRACT
The role of social Networking Sites in Indian politics has risen tremendously in the recent years. Different Indian political parties have their own websites which was not seen some years back and some of them also use other social mediums to interact with people. With every party having its own website and leaders being active on different media it makes the citizens feel that they are within their reach. The need to take appointments or wait for them to talk is no longer required. The leaders are accessible at the click of a button. With the growth in the use of social media by politicians, the gap between the politician and citizen has been narrowed down. Social media can be defined as a platform in a network where members can share and discuss the information among them. Social media has become a powerful tool in the political campaigning and almost all political parties are using social media platform to reach out to the public.

Keywords: *Social Media, Indian democracy, Loksabha election-2014, Facebook, Twitter etc.*

INTRODUCTION
In the recent year's internet, particularly social media has changed the means in which politician and citizen network among themselves. Social media has almost eliminated the social and financial barriers that exist in the society. [1]

Mr. Narendra Modi, prime minister of India has used all media to interact with people. He has been effectively using social media to disseminate information and remain in touch with the young population of India. Mr. Rahul Gandhi who is one of the icons of youth in India has used almost every social medium apart from actual communication to interact with the people and especially youths. He has used social networking websites like Facebook to talk to people and prominent people as well as common man interacts at the same time.i

The election campaign held for India in 2014 was the second most expensive campaign in the history of world, after the US presidential Campaign. The 1992 presidential election in US ushered in a new era of campaign media and next only stands the 2014 election held in for Lok Sabha elections in India in terms of technology and amount of money spent. There was an important development in the campaigning procedure as the parties tried to adopt pioneering campaigning approaches like digital rallies, social media, crowd fundraising and effective storytelling rather than run through the conventional mean of media communication of print and broadcast.

Electorates turned into more obviously involved with campaign media, particularly through radio and television programs. Communication scholars wondered about the beginning of the new era of campaign media, consecutively admiring its main stream trends and lamenting on the deprivation of political homily. The tendencies like political discourses were rooted mainly in traditional media. Less than a decade, innovative technological knowledge had enabled a main change in the campaign media structure that takes reformed methods in which political drives are conducted by candidates, described by the journalists, and experienced by electorates.ii

The three American social media giants- Facebook, Twitter and Google- have emerged as a major player in the 2014 general elections in India, with political parties and candidates competing with each other in breaking the news, spreading their message through these outlets in addition to those via the traditional media. For instance, at that time, Facebook had around 100 million users in India- its largest outside the US, while that of Twitter has more than doubled since January this year. After the 7th round of polling, there were 49 million Indian elections-

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related conversations on Twitter- more than double the 20 million Indian elections- related conversation on Twitter for all of 2013. In 2009, Sashi Tharoor was the only Indian politician to have a Twitter account and had 6,000 followers. Five years later there is hardly any major political leader who does not have an account on the micro-blogging site. With political parties, leaders and candidates putting their advertisement on social media to reach out to their voters, all the three major players are reported to have made substantial addition to their revenue. Though none of the companies are willing to discuss the advertisement revenue this election cycle, all of them have put in several months of tireless efforts and diverted substantial amount of their resources in the elections, many of them working thousands of miles away from India.

Adam Sharp, Head of Government and Nonprofits at Twitter, who has been involved in participating in elections in various countries of the world, said Twitter is a powerful way to return to retail politics. He conceded that elections have helped Twitter expand in India.iii

The influence of social media involved campaign is proved in the outcome of the 2014 Lok Sabha elections in the country. Mass media are no longer the modest transporters of news, but have become tremendously powerful performers in the political game with autonomous powers of their own. They can destroy or extend political careers which is proved with the massive impressing victory of BJP which rooted out the political career of Congress, the legendary party which ruled the nation after independence. BJP won 137 seats out of 282 (Election Commission of India figures). The victory was secured by achieving more than half of the total votes polled. Furthermore in 169 seats, the party's vote share was more than the vote shares of other political parties that completed second, third and fourth put together.

The view is that the modern media (Social media) are no longer the 'fourth estate' that infroms the public and acts as 'watch-dog of the constitution'. They have become a kind of fifth column with great but hidden political power and little accountability. Asit can be observed that BJP won two thirds of the highly urban seats and more than half of the rural seats. While the massive BJP victory can be attributed to the impact of new media.iv

Objectives of the study

- To know the presence of the respondents on social media.

- To understand the reasons of lack of presence on social media among those who are not on any social media site.

- To know which of the social media sites are more popular among the people.

- To find the hours spend on social media in a week.

- To explore the purposes for which the social media is commonly used.

- To understand the influence of social media on life style of respondents.

- Understand the trust among the respondents on the authenticity and reliability of the information received through these sites.

- Examine the influence of social media in nation building.

- Examine the influence of social media on the Indian democracy.

Hypothesis Development

- **Null Hypothesis (H$_0$):** There is no difference in perception of people on the basis of gender, age, education, working status and income

- **Alternate Hypothesis (Ha):** The perception of people differs on the basis of gender, age, education, working status and income

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RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Sample selection

To achieve the objectives questionnaire based data was collected from the Delhi and NCR region. Keeping in view the upcoming elections in Punjab, a team of students went to Punjab and talked to the local residents of the area to know their perceptions relating to the influence of social media on the upcoming elections.

Dependent variables

Social media is an evolving technology and entering in our lives at a very fast pace. Keeping in view limited research in this area, the dependent variables were defined using journal articles, articles in newspapers, blogs on social media etc. This is a novel idea to understand the influence of social media on lifestyle, reliability and authenticity of information on social media, its influence on Indian democracy and its role in nation building.

Independent variables

Demographic characteristics of the respondents were taken as Independent variables. This study tried to find if there is any significant difference in the perception of people on the basis of gender, age, profession, working status and income relating to the influence of social media on Indian Democracy. Following tables show the distribution of the sample.

Gender				
Valid	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Male	419	58.5	58.5	58.5
Female	297	41.5	41.5	100.0
Total	716	100.0	100.0	
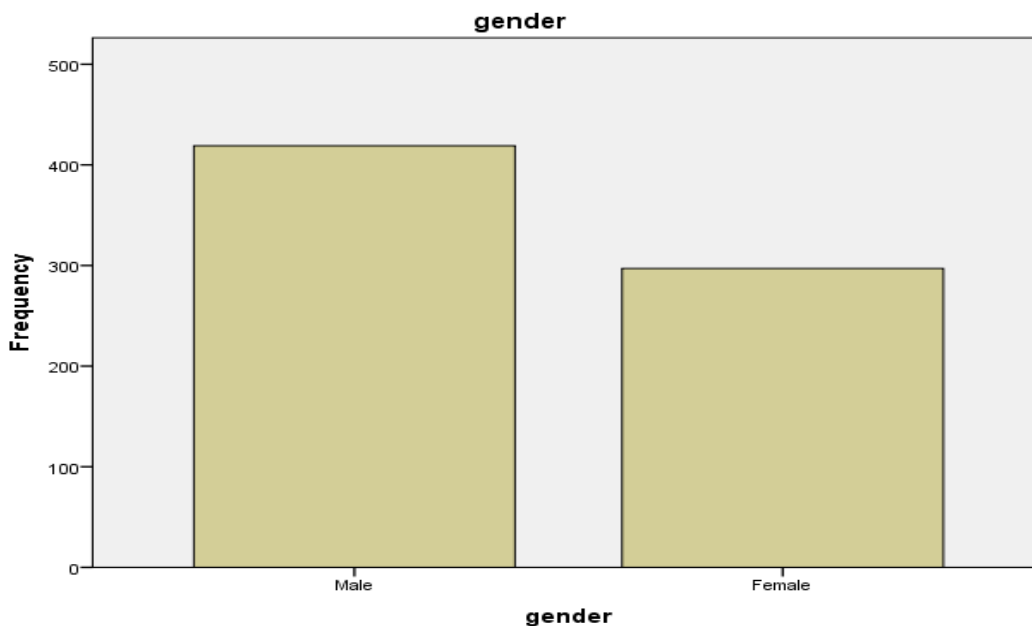
Education				
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
	Graduation	24	3.4	3.4	3.4
Valid	Post-Graduation	638	89.1	89.1	92.5
	Professional	54	7.5	7.5	100.0
	Total	716	100.0	100.0	

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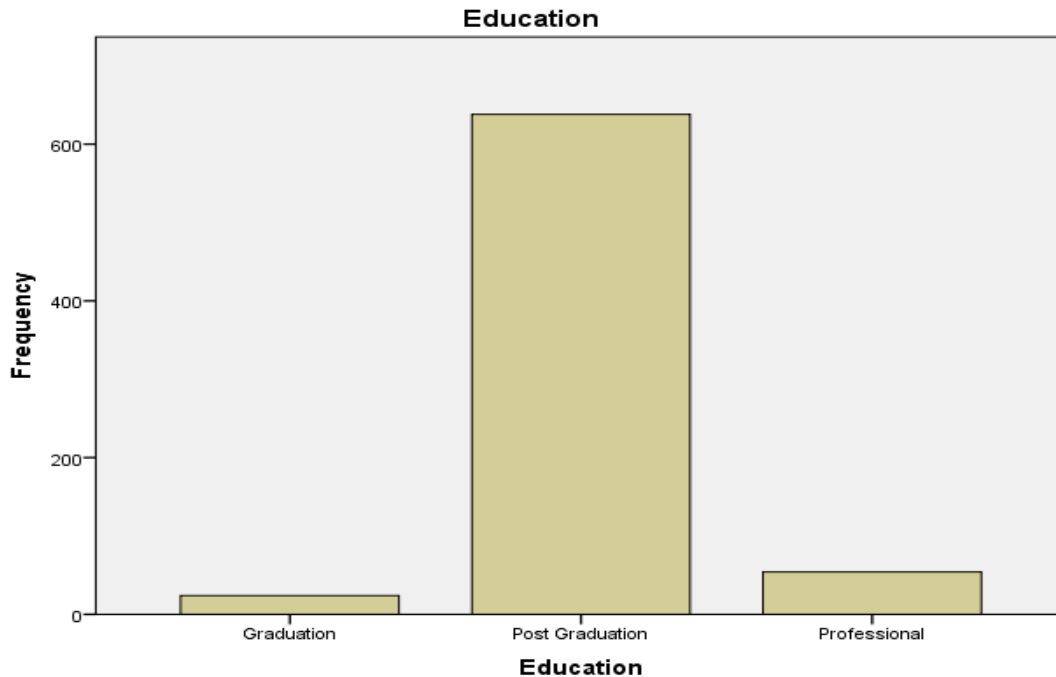
Questionnaire Development

To achieve the objectives of the study a questionnaire was developed. The questionnaire had 4 sections. Section 1 was to take demographic information of the respondents like gender, age, education, working status and income. Section 2 took information on the type of social media and the extent of usage. It had questions on presence on social media (Yes/No), If not then reasons for not using social media and membership of social media forms. It also asked the number of hours spent on social media and the purpose of using social media.

Section 3 was to capture perceptions of the respondents on influence of social media on trust and lifestyle of the respondents. Section 4 captured perceptions relating to influence of social media on Indian democracy and nation building. Section 3 and 4 captured the perceptions on a 5 point likert scale with 1 for strongly disagree, 2 for disagree, 3 for can't say, 4 for agree and 5 for strongly agree.

Data collection

Primary data was collected from 716 respondents.

Statistical procedures

The data thus collected was analyzed on SPSS 21 software. Independent sample t test was used to find if there is any significant difference among men and women relating to the dependent variables and one way ANOVA were used to find differences on the basis of age, education, working status and income.

Analysis of results

1. **Social media presence**

The respondents were asked if they have an account on any social media site and if not then why not. Out of 716 respondents, 28 people said that they don't use social media whereas 688 people use at least one of social media sites. The present data shows that 96% percent among all the respondents are using social media which is a huge number which indicates that India is already present in digital space.

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Use of social media				
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	No	28	3.9	3.9	3.9
	Yes	688	96.1	96.1	100.0
	Total	716	100.0	100.0	
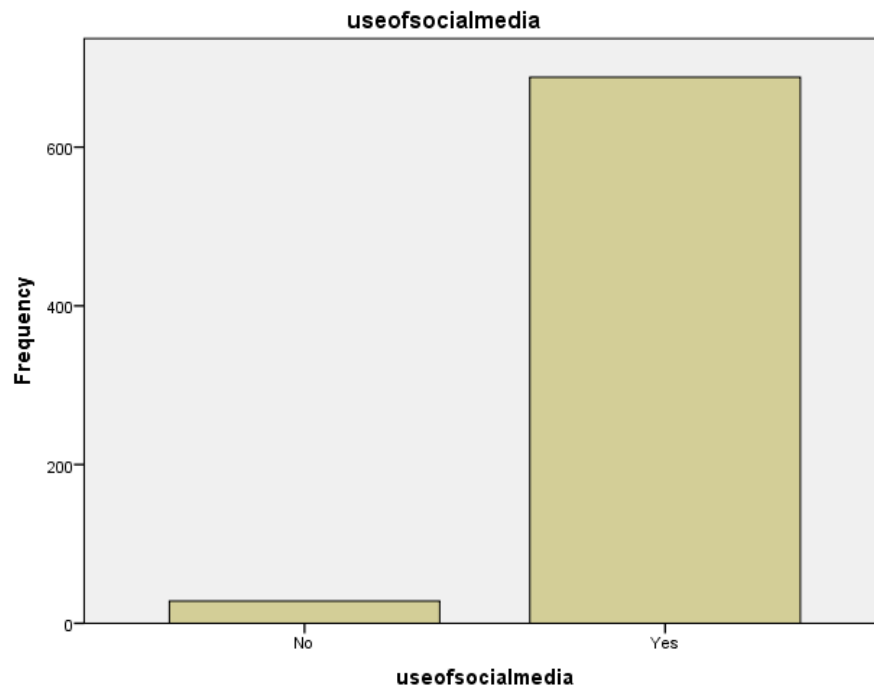
As the results show, only 3.9 percent of the respondents were not using social media. Most of them were above 40 years of age and quoted "Not Interested" as the major reason of not using social media. It is also found that mostly youngsters are hooked towards social media sites and also old people are attracting towards it but it will take more time to penetrate in this age group.

2. **Hours spent on social media**

The respondents were asked about the number of hours spent on social media on a week. Following table and figure show the results.

Weekly hours					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	0-5 hours	226	31.6	32.1	32.1
	6-10 hours	87	12.2	12.4	44.5
	11 - 20 hours	16	2.2	2.3	46.7
	21 - 30 hours	111	15.5	15.8	62.5
	31-40 hours	131	18.3	18.6	81.1
	more than 40 hours	133	18.6	18.9	100.0
	Total	704	98.3	100.0	
Missing	in System	12	1.7		
Total		716	100.0		

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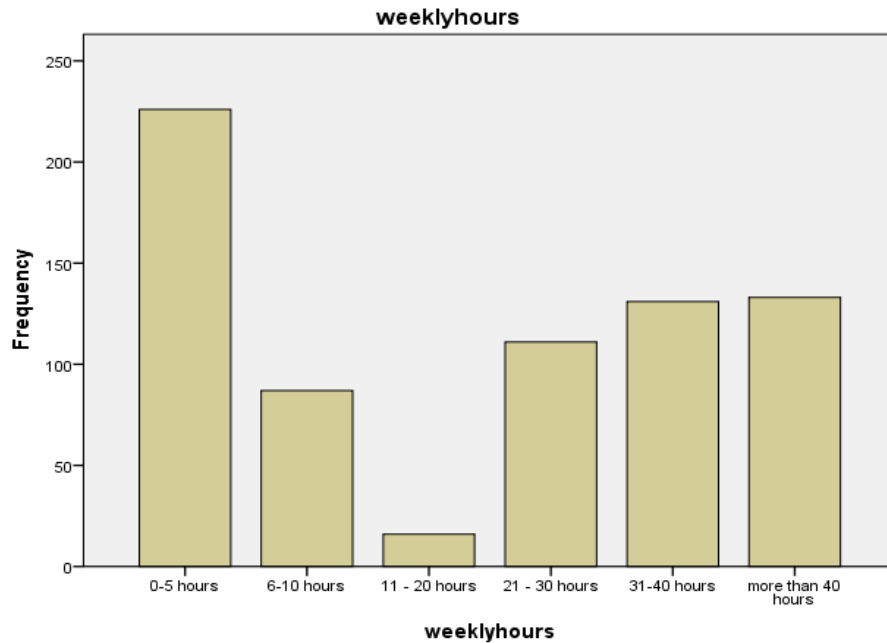
According to the respondents and our research on 716 people, out of which data of 12 people were missing. Amongst the remaining 704 respondents, 226 people spend time or use social media. 0-5 hours in a week. Number of people using social media for 6-10 hours is 87. 16 people said that they use social media for around 11-20 hours a week. Number of people using social media sites for 21-30 hours per week is 131 whereas number of people using more than 40 hours a week is 133. These data are allowing us to notice how more and more people are spending more and more time in social media.

3. PURPOSE OF USING SOCIAL MEDIA

The respondents were asked to indicate the purpose for which they use social media. Respondents were given options of Chatting, Sharing and Uploading pictures, entertainment, education and knowledge and expressing opinion on several political and social. Most people use social media for chatting through which they can connect with their friends, family and distant relatives. Through chatting people can share their feelings and location with their family friends instantly. Apart from chatting most people share and upload pictures in these social media sites and these pictures can help create their status in front of their friends. Entertainment also secures a top position where people use these sites for entertaining themselves. Through these sites people can get quick information about their favorite movie star and entertainers. People also use these sites for gaining knowledge and education through various news portals' social media handles. It gives us varied knowledge about an incident and event at the earliest.

Social media is also used by people to get news and information about political events and also a medium of political discussions. It also helps in generating awareness about social causes.

4. ANALYSIS ON THE BASIS OF INDEPENDENT VARIABLES

This section presents analysis of the dependent variables on the basis independent Variables. The analysis is done at 5% level of significance. Thus if P value is less than .05, the results are significant and we reject the null hypothesis that there is no difference and conclude that the perceptions relating to that dependent variable differ.

4.1. On the basis of Gender

The following table shows the results of independent sample t test run on SPSS 21 with gender as independent variable

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	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	F	P Value	Finding
SM is important	Male	414	3.79	.929	.046	.264	.608	Not significant
	Female	283	3.86	.887	.053			
Reflects Status and personality	Male	412	3.06	1.086	.053	2.068	.151	Not significant
	Female	283	2.92	.953	.057			
Privacy Protected	Male	414	3.04	.993	.049	2.617	.106	Not significant
	Female	283	3.11	.888	.053			
Information Authentic	Male	414	3.37	.769	.038	1.624	.203	Not significant
	Female	279	3.30	.838	.050			
Influence on personal Growth	Male	354	2.98	.909	.048	7.423	.007	Significant
	Female	242	3.26	.902	.058			
Influence on professional Growth	Male	408	3.36	1.198	.059	30.562	.000	Significant
	Female	281	3.10	.958	.057			
Influence on Relationships	Male	408	3.43	1.063	.053	54.951	.000	Significant
	Female	279	3.67	.766	.046			
Influence on Education	Male	408	2.98	1.110	.055	17.649	.000	Significant
	Female	278	3.17	.912	.055			
Influence on Health and Fitness	Male	410	3.54	.788	.039	8.175	.004	Significant
	Female	293	3.68	.811	.047			
Relevant platform for social issues	Male	408	3.42	.849	.042	3.499	.062	Not significant
	Female	290	3.52	.799	.047			
Relevant platform for Environment	Male	371	3.36	.784	.041	11.362	.001	Significant
	Female	242	3.58	.726	.047			
Relevant platform for Political	Male	411	.37	.483	.024	18.841	.000	Significant
	Female	287	.53	.500	.030			
Follow Political Party on SMS	Male	409	.43	.495	.024	1.163	.281	Not significant
	Female	287	.59	.492	.029			
Follow Government Activities on SM	Male	412	2.92	1.358	.067	5.344	.021	Significant
	Female	288	3.06	1.204	.071			
Influence on voting decision	Male	403	3.58	.813	.041	10.864	.001	Significant
	Female	289	3.66	1.036	.061			
Influence on recent elections	Male	350	3.65	.953	.051	2.737	.099	Not significant
	Female	232	3.78	.929	.061			
Information on government programmes	Male	409	3.21	.989	.049	2.483	.116	Not significant
	Female	286	3.73	1.189	.070			
Role in nation building	Male	409	3.52	.837	.041	29.431	.000	Significant
	Female	283	3.59	1.137	.068			
Increased account ability of government	Male	403	3.58	.813	.041	10.864	.001	Significant
	Female	289	3.66	1.036	.061			

In this part we put forward the gathered data from 716 respondents on the basis of their gender and how usage and spending of time and reason of using social media varies from male to female. Various parameters were analyzed in this part of the questionnaire.

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4.2. **On the basis of Age**

The following table shows the results of one way ANOVA run on SPSS 21 with age as Independent variable

		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	F	Sig.	Findings
SM is important	Below 20 years	213	3.66	1.165	.080	10.930	.000	**Significant**
	20 - 30 years	391	3.96	.782	.040			
	30 - 40 years	65	3.77	.606	.075			
	Above 40 years	28	3.14	.356	.067			
	Total	697	3.82	.912	.035			
Reflects Status and personality	Below 20 years	213	3.01	1.217	.083	16.484	.000	**Significant**
	20 - 30 years	389	3.13	.943	.048			
	30 - 40 years	65	2.69	.705	.087			
	Above 40 years	28	1.86	.356	.067			
	Total	695	3.00	1.035	.039			
Privacy Protected	Below 20 years	213	3.23	1.160	.079	11.123	.000	**Significant**
	20 - 30 years	391	3.00	.844	.043			
	30 - 40 years	65	3.34	.619	.077			
	Above 40 years	28	2.29	.713	.135			
	Total	697	3.07	.952	.036			
Information Authentic	Below 20 years	213	3.15	.865	.059	47.542	.000	**Significant**
	20 - 30 years	387	3.54	.698	.035			
	30 - 40 years	65	2.55	.531	.066			
	Above 40 years	28	4.00	.000	.000			
	Total	693	3.34	.798	.030			
Influence on personal Growth	Below 20 years	188	3.01	1.109	.081	3.479	.016	**Significant**
	20 - 30 years	315	3.13	.835	.047			
	30 - 40 years	65	3.31	.660	.082			
	Above 40 years	28	2.71	.713	.135			
	Total	596	3.09	.916	.038			

		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	F	Sig.	Findings
Influence on professional Growth	Below 20 years	213	3.19	1.405	.096	1.061	.365	**Not significant**
	20 - 30 years	383	3.26	.983	.050			
	30 - 40 years	65	3.31	.683	.085			
	Above 40 years	28	3.57	1.069	.202			
	Total	689	3.25	1.113	.042			
Influence on Relationships	Below 20 years	213	3.12	1.202	.082	34.128	.000	**Significant**
	20 - 30 years	383	3.84	.753	.038			
	30 - 40 years	65	3.31	.660	.082			
	Above 40 years	26	3.00	.000	.000			
	Total	687	3.53	.961	.037			
Influence on Education	Below 20 years	213	2.95	1.008	.069	19.095	.000	**Significant**
	20 - 30 years	383	3.12	1.079	.055			
	30 - 40 years	62	3.52	.535	.068			
	Above 40 years	28	1.86	.356	.067			
	Total	686	3.05	1.038	.040			

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Influence on Health and Fitness	Below 20 years	213	3.40	.822	.056	45.261	.000	**Significant**
	20 - 30 years	385	3.73	.749	.038			
	30 - 40 years	77	3.95	.223	.025			
	Above 40 years	28	2.29	.713	.135			
	Total	703	3.60	.800	.030			
Relevant platform for social issues	Below 20 years	213	3.35	.809	.055	13.378	.000	**Significant**
	20 - 30 years	383	3.45	.902	.046			
	30 - 40 years	77	3.96	.195	.022			
	Above 40 years	25	3.04	.200	.040			
	Total	698	3.46	.830	.031			
Relevant platform for Environment	Below 20 years	200	3.25	.824	.058	55.798	.000	**Significant**
	20 - 30 years	310	3.65	.651	.037			
	30 - 40 years	77	3.65	.480	.055			
	Above 40 years	26	2.00	.000	.000			
	Total	613	3.45	.768	.031			
Relevant platform for Political	Below 20 years	213	.54	.500	.034	25.935	.000	**Significant**
	20 - 30 years	384	.47	.500	.026			
	30 - 40 years	77	.08	.270	.031			
	Above 40 years	24	.00	.000	.000			
	Total	698	.43	.496	.019			
Follow Political Party on SMS	Below 20 years	211	.54	.500	.034	10.740	.000	**Significant**
	20 - 30 years	384	.53	.500	.026			
	30 - 40 years	77	.38	.488	.056			
	Above 40 years	24	.00	.000	.000			
	Total	696	.50	.500	.019			
Follow Government Activities on SMS	Below 20 years	211	2.42	1.120	.077	30.224	.000	**Significant**
	20 - 30 years	387	3.19	1.298	.066			
	30 - 40 years	78	3.67	1.224	.139			
	Above 40 years	24	2.21	.721	.147			
	Total	700	2.98	1.297	.049			
Influence on voting decision	Below 20 years	209	3.56	.831	.057	32.378	.000	**Significant**
	20 - 30 years	380	3.76	.785	.040			
	30 - 40 years	79	3.56	1.278	.144			
	Above 40 years	24	2.00	.000	.000			
	Total	692	3.61	.913	.035			
Influence on recent elections	Below 20 years	199	3.53	1.004	.071	52.775	.000	**Significant**
	20 - 30 years	282	3.84	.702	.042			
	30 - 40 years	75	4.28	.966	.112			
	Above 40 years	26	2.00	.000	.000			
	Total	582	3.71	.945	.039			
Information on government program	Below 20 years	211	3.43	1.041	.072	38.362	.000	**Significant**
	20 - 30 years	381	3.22	1.107	.057			
	30 - 40 years	77	4.56	.639	.073			
	Above 40 years	26	2.92	.272	.053			
	Total	695	3.42	1.105	.042			
Role in nation building	Below 20 years	211	3.53	.758	.052	26.111	.000	**Significant**
	20 - 30 years	378	3.65	.959	.049			

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	30 - 40 years	77	3.64	1.245	.142			
	Above 40 years	26	2.00	.000	.000			
	Total	692	3.55	.971	.037			
Increased accountability Of government	Below 20 years	209	3.56	.831	.057	32.378	.000	**Significant**
	20 - 30 years	380	3.76	.785	.040			
	30 - 40 years	79	3.56	1.278	.144			
	Above 40 years	24	2.00	.000	.000			
	Total	692	3.61	.913	.035			

Interpretation of results

The results of the analysis report a high mean (above 3) for almost all independent variables which shows that the influence of social media on lifestyle, democracy and nation building is quiet high. We found some differences in the perception of the respondents on the basis of demographic variables.

Women reported greater influence of social media on personal growth while men perceived that social media has influence on professional growth, relationships, education and health and fitness. Social media apparently has higher influence on the political opinion and voting decision of men than women. Men perceived greater role of social media in nation building and in increasing accountability of government. It is found that most of the respondents believe that Social media's importance, social media's role to reflect status and personality, its ability to protect privacy and information authenticity is not significant. Whereas, they believe that social media significantly influence personal as well as professional growth of people. They also agreed that social media's influence on relationship, education and health and fitness is significant. But respondents said that social media is not significantly a relevant platform for social issues whereas they believe it is a relevant platform for environment, and politics.

This collection of data was done in the year 2014 and after it many elections took place and also many changes took place in the use of social media since 2014.

CONCLUSION

A positive development of social Networking sites emergence has been that the youth is talking about the political issues. Earlier the political discussions were restricted only to those who read newspapers, watched news channels or participated in discussions in nukkad of a village or clubs. But now, social networking sites has made the youth of India to sit up and discuss political issues. They spend time to analyze and discuss politics. Social media outlets are essential to politicians and political parties, enabling them to gain support, encourage participation and have an open and continuous dialogue. Most importantly social media allows the highly motivated people to create a context more easily in which the barely motivated people can be effective without having to become activists themselves, creating an environment perfect for politicians to utilize. Social networking sites have been able to make profound impact by means of news, interaction, learning and marketing. Social networking sites have become an important source of news. Various news channels tweet or give updates on significant happenings all over the world and the news quickly gets passed around the networks in ways never experienced before. It allows people to keep in touch more regularly. People in different cities, countries and continents can keep in touch effortlessly and it creates an opportunity to experience different cultures and exchange opinions.v

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